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Emergence of Women from 'Private' to 'Public': A Narrative of Power Politics from Mizoram¹

By Anup Shekhar Chakraborty²

Abstract

Understanding the complex state-building process in Mizoram requires the systematic mapping of the discourses and narratives of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' at all levels which is thoroughly dictated by those in power. The region's 'Histories' of statecraft and policies displays a distinct narrative than that of mainland India. The 'Northeast' in general and Mizoram in particular, provides a unique experience in understanding the trends in everyday politics as 'a living space' in contemporary India. Mizoram, as a category in contemporary Indian politics reminds one of 'the protracted insurgency led by the legendary Laldenga and the Mizo National Front'. The region remains a geo-political puzzle and mapping its location becomes a perplexing task for most Indians. The complexities involved in the regions politics, state-building and citizen-building efforts based on the logic of exclusions and inclusions, hardly echoes beyond the Zo tlang ram. Against this silhouette, the paper attempts, first, at peeping through the 'Zo' Oral traditions; and the impact of Colonialism and Christianity- the timeless gendered practices in the Zo/Mizo society. Second, it attempts at reflecting on the Human Rights situation of women in the state building process of Mizoram from the Insurgency period onwards. Third, it attempts at highlighting the survival strategies adopted by the women to create their own spaces and have their voices heard in the public sphere.

Keywords: Women, Private/Public, Politics, Mizoram

Introduction

Understanding the complex state-building process in Mizoram requires the systematic mapping of the discourses and narratives of *inclusion and exclusion* at all levels which is thoroughly dictated¹ by those in power. The region's 'Histories' of statecraft and policies displays a distinct narrative than that of mainland India (Baroah

¹ Mizoram, one of the federal states of India located at the extreme northeastern fringe has experienced diverse socio-political upheavals ranging from secession to acceptance of the constitutional mechanism of India to being 'an Island of Peace', within a span of three decades. The whole territory officially came under British rule in 1895. The area was bifurcated into South Lushai Hills under the Superintendent or Assistant Political Officer of Chittagong Division of Bengal Province, and the North Lushai Hills under the control of the Political Officer who worked for the Chief Commissioner of the Assam Government. The North Lushai Hills and the South Lushai Hills were amalgamated as one district- 'The Lushai Hills District' in 1898, and kept under the charge of one Superintendent who in turn worked under the Chief Commissioner of Assam (Ray, 1982, pp.12-17, 20-24; Lalrimawia, 1983; Singh, 1994, pp.113-114).

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& Scott, 1970; Guha, 1977, 1991; Dubey, 1978; Baruah, 2005). The 'Northeast' in general and Mizoram in particular provides a unique experience in understanding the trends in everyday politics as a living space (Lefebvre, 1991) in contemporary India. Mizoram, as a category in contemporary Indian politics 'rings the faint bell' of 'the protracted insurgency led by the legendary Laldenga, of the Mizo National Front in the Christian area'; and the success of India's democratic mechanisms as reflected through the *dual processes* of (1) *the signing of the Peace Accord (1986)* (Jyotirindra in Basu & Kohli, 1998, pp. 183-214) and (2) *the implementation of 'Cosmetic Federalism'* (Baruah, 2005). The region remains a geo-political puzzle and mapping its location and its people becomes a quest in itself for many Indians². The stereotypical images of the people of the North-East, especially the Mizos as having '*alien culture*', *backward*, *Christians*, '*Open sex societies*', *underdeveloped tribes with weird food habits*, *infamously known as the 'dog-eaters' and so on* (Hluna, 1985a) perpetually perplexes the mainland Indians. The complexities involved in the regions politics, state-building and citizen-building efforts based on the logic of *exclusions and inclusions*, hardly echoes beyond the *Zo tlang ram*³. Against this silhouette, the paper attempts, *first*, at peeping through the '*Zo*' *Oral traditions*⁴; and the impact of Colonialism and Christianity- the timeless gendered practices in the Zo/Mizo society. *Second*, it attempts at reflecting on the Human Rights situation of women in the state building process of Mizoram from the Insurgency period onwards. *Third*, it attempts at highlighting the *survival strategies* adopted by the women to create their own spaces and have their voices heard in the public domain.

Time and Women

A peep into the Zo Oral Traditions

The *Kuki-Chin-Mizo oral traditions* reflect the broad spectrum of marginalisation of women in the Zo/Mizo society. The common *sayings* about women for instance, '*Pal hlui leh nupui hlui chu a thlak thei*' (An old fence and an old wife can both be replaced), '*Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo*' (The wisdom of women does not extend beyond the limit of the village water source), '*Hmeichhia leh ui pui chu lo rum lungawi mai mai rawh se*' (Let a woman or a dog bark to its heart's content) '*Hmeichhe thu thu ni suh; chakai sa sa ni suh*' (Just as the meat of a crab is no meat, so the word of a woman is no word) (Thanga, 1978; Samuelson, 1991; Ralte, 1993) etc. serve as evidences for the historical role ascribed to the women in the Zo society. For instance, women in the Mizo society have been ascribed the role of an '*out-let*' (*thereby reduced to the position of the sexual organs*) to creation but not the status of a procreator, for such a revered position is reserved only for the male-vigour, the powerful *Pasaltha*⁵. As a result, men in the Mizo society consciously or unconsciously treated women as a sexual being whose urges need to be repressed and directed. These sayings also serve as justifications for the distorted and stereotyped construction of *gendered practices* in the Zo/Mizo society – old as well as new. Reading between the lines of these narratives helps to understand two important phenomenon: First, the *calculated process of displacement*⁶ of the female and of the marginal agencies by the patriarchy; and Second, the grim situation of the rights ('Human Rights') of woman in the traditional Zo/Mizo society, though few scholars contest the claim that the position of women was better in the pre-British times than most other societies (Chatterji, 1975a; Sangkima, 1988).

Colonial and Christian Experiences

Colonialism introduced two *external symbols of power*, namely the British Superintendent (Politico-Administrative head) and Christian Missionaries both of which were considered to be *superior*⁷ by the primitive tribes as evident from the names given to these colonial symbols '*Lal man tu*' ('one who catches the chiefs') for the Superintendent; and '*Thlarau man tu*' ('one who catches the spirit') for the Missionaries. The Whiteman's way of life and religion⁸ *delivered the tribes from fear of evil, death and uncertainty* of a war prone migratory life at the psychological level (Lorrain, 1912 (1988), pp. 222-224). 'Religion and Politics' thus began to play an overwhelming role in Mizoram (Downs, 1983, pp. 47-48) and began to be considered superior, powerful and therefore, more alluring. This, in turn led to the 'male-fying'⁹ of religion and politics and the creation of the *Nexus of Patriarchy*¹⁰. By the same token, the Mizo patriarchy under the impact of Christian traditions began to view economics and the notions of *business and profit* to be both sensuous and materialistic and linked them with the notions of *original sin* and *sexuality*. The '*Nexus of Patriarchy*' as a result began to associate the '*Triad of the Marginals*'¹¹ with moral degradation, sin, immorality and everything signified by the word '*Khawvel*' (worldly).

Christianity, at one level, brought about 'temporal relief' to women (Ralte, 1993) through the systematic decline of the traditional symbols of patriarchy namely, the *Zawlbuk*¹² (Chatterji, 1975b; Sangkima, 1987) and the Chieftainship (Lalrimawia, 1982, 1983). The oppressed sections of the 'Zo society' passively welcomed this *change* and failed to understand the underlying politics of proselytization. The Colonizers initially supported the cause of women and the marginals; but once the mission of Conversion was completed, the cause of women and marginals was systematically sidelined. Further reaffirming the view that the sole motive of the Christian Missionaries and the British Raj was *proselytization* so as to 'tame' the wild tribes of the frontier regions and annex their land so as to serve the commercial interests of the *British Tea Plantations in the North-East of India* (Guha, 1977: 1991; Zairema, 1978, p 1; Allen, 1979; Chatterjee, 1990, p. 144). The missionaries cleverly *modified* the teachings of the Gospel and presented a *Customised -Localised Gospel*¹³ to suit the understandings of the primitive tribes. The Missionaries and the 'Black-coats', in order to win over the natives, also began to simultaneously equate 'Pathian' (The traditional Mizo/Zo male divinity of the heavens) with the 'image' of the Biblical 'God' (Father) of the Trinity; and projected Jesus as the son ('*Fa-pa*') of 'Pathian', and also *Pu Pawla* with St. Paul in order to suit the sensibilities of the Zo tribes. Localisation of the Gospel contributed to dual process of the assimilation of the chauvinistic traditional Mizo practices into the already *male centric Christian religion*¹⁴ and vice versa. The language of the mission, thus became *sexualized and gendered* (Matthews, 2001, p. 7) and sidelined the cause of women as they found this strategy to be more useful for their goal of mass proselytization. In short, language (spoken words) and symbols (dress code and colours) were used as weapons for showing Zo/Mizo women their spatial position and inferior status in the social hierarchy. For instance, men in the Zo/Mizo society consider '*puanfen*' (skirts) to be the symbol of femininity i.e. inferior and make it a point never to wash 'skirts', whatever the situation be, this is true for male domestic helpers as well. Men in the Mizo society, usually try to dictate terms to *their* women, as to what they wear, whom to marry etc¹⁵.

In order to gain the confidence and support of the patriarchal mindset, the church introduced Victorian morality, which became the guiding beacon for judging everyday Zo/Mizo social relations. Thus in a way, the language of the mission, fused the elements of patriarchal chauvinism inherent in the Mizo socio-religious system, with that of the patriarchal biases in the Judeo-Christian traditions. The internalization of the Bible, for instance, 'the story of the Creation- the *fall from Eden, Original Sin*', 'stereotypical depictions of the Jews' etc. further justified the repression of women in particular, and the marginals in general. Controlling the sexuality and mapping the spatial domain¹⁶ of the '*Triad of the Marginals*' thus became the holy goal of the Zo Christian society. In other words, notions of spirituality, divinity and *God* (Daly, 1973, pp.19- 20) began to be used as weapons to oppress women.

Indigenous Mizo religion, which revered women deities like '*Khuanu*' amidst the male god- '*Pathian*' and a neutral divinity- '*Khuavang*', was completely erased (Chhange, 1987, pp. 32-34; Ralte, 1993, pp. 130-131). The role of women attaining or being capable of attaining divinity was totally wiped-out by Christianity, which prescribed and reserved such positions 'Only for Men' (Haddad & Esposito, 2001, p. 66), and this resulted in 'God', being imagined and perceived only as male (Ruether in Haddad & Esposito, 2001, pp. 65-80). This exclusion of women, resulted in a systematic distortion of all the symbols of Christian theology by patriarchal bias (Ruether, 1993). Christianity cleverly sustained patriarchal elements in the Zo/Mizo society and erased the matriarchal elements in order to maintain the hold of patriarchy (both traditional & new) and thereby, sustain the British rule. The transition from the indigenous traditional religion to Christianity led to *the wholesale slaughter of the indigenous Mizo/Zo culture* (Downs, 1983, pp.14-15; Thomas, 1993; Ralte, 1993) no doubt, but it had evangelical effects on the Zo/Mizo society ushering in the high tide of western enlightenment, education-scientific temper, morality, politics, and the power to read and internalize the 'Holy Gospel'. However, it failed to end the conservative attitudes and bring about a change in the position of women and the marginalized (Ralte, 1993). For instance, the *Mizo Hnam Dan*¹⁷ i.e. traditional laws continue to dictate the terms of Marriage price¹⁸, dowry and divorce.

Even though Mizo women enjoyed considerable *freedom*¹⁹ in *Nula-rim* (courting), marriage, sex, and divorce, they somewhat played a muted role when it came to the matters of property, decision-making, and politics. These freedoms granted to Mizo women are not backed by evangelical motives but are accepted merely for the fact that they are advantageous to men (Thomas, 1993: p. 16). Change in the Zo/Mizo society has been a change for convenience rather than progress, for instance, changes in the *laws of Inheritance*²⁰, which can be considered to be reflective of modern democracy culminating in the new found '*Economic independence*' of women, has not resulted in changing the power relations and the situation of rights in the Zo/Mizo society (Thomas, 1993). To cite a support to the argument, that the 'change in the Mizo society has been for convenience rather than progress' is that of 'Sawn man'. If a man wishes to evade the responsibility of a child born out of wedlock, he simply pays an adequate fine called '*Sawn man*' of rupees forty to the girl's father or brother so as to avoid the liability of the child. The provisions of *Sawn man* under 'Notification No. JUD. 10/58/114 of 3rd Oct. 1958' provides that in case the same man, fathers a second child to the same woman, there is no need to pay *Sawn man*, as the fine is applicable only on every alternate child. Such a provision

reflects the distorted sense of justice prevalent in Mizo/Zo society which equips a man with powers to suit his convenience and still remain unaccountable.

The inherent contradictions²¹ between 'tradition and modernity' continue to undermine the very existence of women and the marginalized. The psychological impact of all these discriminatory processes functioning through diverse mediums results in '*Emotional Dependence*' (Daly, 1973: pp. 54-55). Thus, even though women are educated and play an important role in the Zo/Mizo economics, these facts seldom filter into the politics of Mizoram. The hegemony of the '*Nexus of Patriarchy*', systematically displaces women and the marginals from the space of power and authority. The inherent *sexism* and forced subordination results in the birth of this exclusively skewed phenomenon of displacement of women and marginals from the realms of politics – power and authority, reflecting the "*Fear Psychology*" that haunts the patriarchy in any given society.

State Building and Women

Women and the Insurgency

The protracted history of insurgency led by the legendary Laldenga and his Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram (Hluna, 1985b) witnessed the high handed accesses of the Indian Armed Forces in the name of controlling the secessionist movement and protecting the Indian Nation from foreign influences and dissenting voices. The result of the insurgency and counter-insurgency strategies (Ray, 1982; Barbora, 2006) was the gross violation of the Human Rights of ordinary innocent citizens and the further marginalization of the marginals, especially women. The strategies adopted by both the Center and the MNF led to the dwindling Human Rights situation in the Zo/Mizo society, as is evident from the Memorandum submitted by Brig. T. Sailo and 'The Human Rights Committee of Mizoram' to the Prime Minister of India in 1974 on the 'Civil Military relationship in Mizoram' (Lalchungnunga, 1994, pp. 158-161). The strategies, for instance, the 'Village re-grouping', evening curfews etc. which aimed to counter the MNF movement led to regimentation and gross violation of Human Rights in Mizoram as evident from the unaccounted mass-rape of women by the Security Forces during the period. Naturally, these policies could not be accepted by the common people and the notion of 'Friendly Police', either in the case of Civil Police or Military could never be constructed. On a similar note, the policies of the MNF also disillusioned the common people to a large extent. The 'Quit Mizoram' notices to the 'Vais' (Outsiders), sporadic killings of Government Officials (only 'Vais'), extortions etc. and the victimization of common people, could hardly impress the rationale of the Zo/Mizo society. The public notices issued to the common citizens to support the MNF movement urged the Mizo government servants to resign from Government posts/Offices. This led to the victimization of those who dared to defy the dictates of the MNF, rousing fear and hence, silencing the voices of the marginals. The end result of which was the growth of distorted notions of '*Community Policing*' and the functioning of the politics of *Pan Optics*²².

The issue of Human Rights abuse 'the mass rape of women, burning of villages and Churches by the Indian Armed Forces as a strategy to counter the insurgency' were initially highlighted by Brig. T. Sailo for launching his 'Peoples Conference' (P.C) party and these issues of women were conveniently sidelined, once the party and its leadership got prominence (Ray, 1982, p. 236-237; Lalchungnunga, 1994). Almost all parties and leaders during the insurgency gave lip service to the issue of protection of women and the

marginals. The parties aligned themselves with the powerful Churches and made emotionally appealing public speeches for peace-building and the construction of an 'Ideal Zo Christian State' (Hluna, 1985a). This marked the second instance in the history of *written* politics in the Zo/Mizo society, where the collaborative nexus of 'Politics and Religion' had systematically sidelined the cause of women and the marginals.

Women and Post-Insurgency Mizoram

The post-insurgency state-building process in Mizoram, in general, has tilted heavily on the notions of self-governance and autonomy. In keeping with this spirit, the whole process of 'Zo state-building' has been aimed at freeing and liberating the Zo/Mizo Christian people and their territory²³. The Post-Colonial 'Zo world' has witnessed the dual operation of *Proselytization* and *Colonialism* and the introduction of marked *structural and functional changes* in the Zo/Mizo society (Downs, 1971, 1983, pp. 14-15; Thomas, 1993). The loss of indigenous Zo way of life and the fear of being usurped by *alien cultures*, compelled the Mizos/Zos to live under the spectre of the 'Pan Optics' through the watchful eyes of the State, the Church and its agencies. The Youth organizations like the Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A) (Sangkima, 1985); the Khristian Thalai Pawl (K.T.P) and also the *students' organisation* (Baruah, 2002) like the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (M.Z.P) have been functioning as instruments of '*systemic or structural control*'. These agencies, in their attempts to build the Ideal Zo Christian state project a spectrum of varying attitudes ranging from prohibiting liquor and Drugs, controlling sexual behaviour, prostitution, HIV/AIDS to checking the entry of *foreigners*²⁴ and calling 'Vai Bandhs'²⁵ from time to time. An interesting aspect of these attitudes projected by the Community Policing agencies is that of 'punitive actions' in the name of 'instant justice'. The most common form of these instant justice or punishment being the caging of the culprits (victims) in a 'Savawm Bawm'(Bear Cages/animal traps) and putting them at public display; reminiscent of the pre-colonial tribal days when Human heads or animals caught in a game were displayed for flaunting 'Heroism'.

The enforcement of these attitudes contributes to the further marginalisation of the already marginalized sections of the Zo/Mizo society. The discriminatory processes acting against women at various levels snip their chance to play an *active role in politics* and other determining positions as is evident from the facts backed by statistics. In a state, which boasts of nearly 87 percent female literacy and where women out-number men in as many as 26 out of the 40 constituencies, only one woman has so far been elected to the State Assembly ever since it attained statehood (Singh, 1994, pp. 173-174; Statistical Handbook, 2002: Bhattacharya, Press Trust of India, 2003: <<http://www.rediff.com/election/2003/nov/15mizo.htm>>). A minute analysis of the attitudes projected for state-building reflects, not only the loopholes in the policies of the '*Nexus of Patriarchy*', but also the continued victimization of the *marginals*. For instance, a meticulous survey of several enactments ever since the imposition of 'Total Liquor Prohibition' under the strategy of prohibiting liquor & Drugs (Vanlalhluna, 1996); and the State Excise Department Records (1997-2005) shows a constant rise in illegal liquor trade and Drug trafficking in the region (Statistical Handbook(s), 1994, 1998, 2002; 2006: <[India NewsWebindia123com.htm](http://IndiaNewsWebindia123com.htm)>; Press Trust India / The Assam Tribune 2000: <<http://www.northeastvigil.in/archives/?p=7475>>; 7643; 7948). An interesting observation in almost all these cases of illegal liquor and drug trafficking is

that, women and other *marginals* are picketed and victimized as 'Zu Zuars' (liquor sellers, vendors), drug peddlers; even though state records and surveys reveal the active participation of Mizo men in such dealings. Another instance of discriminatory attitudes and high handedness of the 'Nexus of Patriarchy' targeted specifically at women is the forced closure of the Salvation Army 'night shelter for women', by the Tuikual South Young Mizo Association Branch (Thangliana, Zoram.com 'Narrow minded society'). The State, the Church and its agencies are absolutely *opposed to having a 'red light area'* in the *Ideal Zo Christian state*. These organizations like the Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A), the Khristian Thalai Pawl (K.T.P) & also the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (M.Z.P) have been functioning as self proclaimed 'moral guardians' of the Zo society.

The latest report about 'Crime against women in Mizoram' conducted by the Aizawl based Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), sponsored by National Women's Commission, revealed that teachers and fathers were involved in most of the crimes against women in the state. The report highlighted the general condition of women in the Mizo/Zo society and the psychological violence that takes place most often in homes and school settings by the male members of the family and teachers. Mizoram records the second highest crime rate against women in the North East and on an average; the police registers a case every three days. The most common form of violence against adolescent girls and unmarried women ranged from being pushed or shoved or pulled by the hair to that of the use of weapons or a threat to do so. The research also revealed that eve teasing was a big problem faced by adolescents and unmarried women in the state. 75.81 percent of adolescents in the research had experienced eve teasing while 42.63 percent of unmarried women experienced it. According to police records, the crime rate against women had steadily increased between the years 2001 and 2003. While cases registered in this respect were 114 in 2001, this rose to 136 in 2002 and to 219 in 2003. The report states, that instead of lodging complaints and reporting the incidents to the authority, women are compelled to make compromises or conciliations on the Christian principle of '*forgive and forget*' which is the main obstacle to reveal the exact statistics of women atrocities in Mizoram (Bureau Report, 2006: <zeenews.com>). The superficial imposition of the archaic rules based on Christian ethics on the people for fighting social evils, results in the blatant violation of Human Rights. The enforcement agencies selectively target women, the Poi's (Burmese) and the Vai's and project them as '*the nexus of evil*', conspiring to destabilize the *Ideal Zo Christian state*. Karl Popper's arguments that any attempt to plan or regulate society would result in the reduction of human freedom, stands true for the Zo/ Mizo society. The strategies of selective targeting, 'scapegoat mechanisms' that are employed to camouflage the loopholes and failures of the various attitudes projected for building the *Ideal Zo Christian state* stand as evidences of reduction of 'human freedom'.

Survival Strategies of Women in the Zo/Mizo Society

Women in the Zo/Mizo society backed by Western Education and the Evangelical activities (Lalrimawia, 1984; Hluna, 1985a: 1986) in course of time have challenge the patriarchal hegemony through the formation of women's organizations like the MHT- '*Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual*',²⁶ MHIP- '*Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl*',²⁷ and PHP- '*Puitu Hmeichhe Pawl*' etc, for safeguarding the interests of the Mizo women (Sangkima, 1996: 2004; Aleaz, 2005). The formation of these women's organisation represents *the*

*second instance of rebellion against tradition*²⁸ in the Zo/Mizo society and also symbolizes the *emergence of women* from the spatial existence of the *private* to the *public*, and the creation of an external medium for women's voices to be echoed at the public level through '*Politics of Whispering Bamboo*'²⁹.

The MHIP declared the period 1997-2001 as 'Women's Year' in Mizoram for creation of awareness on issues such as 'the low status of women in the society' and 'to review the Mizo customary law'. In this regard, the MHIP had been touring the length and breadths of the state covering even the most remote and interior villages and conducting workshops, seminars and group discussions. These women's organisations attempt to consolidate the position of women in the Zo/Mizo society and resurrect them from the common disadvantages scripted by the patriarchy. These organisations at different times and in different degrees have fought for women's rights ranging from Customary Rights, Property Rights to Rights of Inheritance etc. These organisations also reflect the mustering of women's voices on the lines of common victimhood and common disadvantages in the Zo/Mizo society against the dictates of the patriarchy. Women in the Zo/Mizo society through the construction of their own spatial zones have provided a breathing space for venting the voices of the marginals. They have been successful in bargaining their own roles within the larger ambit of state building and thus help in proliferating, the benefits of Democracy to the margins. The high tide of these women's activities in the public realms, coincided with the history of Peace-Building in Mizoram. These women's organisations worked in collaboration with the other prominent actors in the Zo/Mizo society and helped brokering Peace. The role played by women in peace-building compelled the *Nexus of Patriarchy* to acknowledge the potential of women and ascribed them the status of Peace- Makers.

These movements organized by women for themselves mark important multi-layered processes. First, the emergence of women from the spatial existence at 'the private' to 'the public' that is the flow of women's voices from the private '*Politics of Whisperings*'³⁰ to the public '*Politics of Whispering Bamboo*'. Second, it reflects the attempt of women to be part of the socio-political mechanisms functioning in the society and thereby, become stakeholders in the state-building process itself. Third, it is an attempt to regulate the hegemony of the 'Nexus of Patriarchy' and act as the conscience of the Zo society itself. Fourth, it is an attempt by women to create a space for their own voices and protect their rights as citizens and human persons.

Conclusion

These strategies employed for constructing the '*Ideal Zo Christian state*', often echoes the frustrations in achieving the same; and directly manifests itself in *the quest of finding the enemy* and the perverse need of creating the '*Other*' as an object of condemnation so that those who condemn can judge themselves to be 'Good' (Szasz, 1970). The *varying attitudes* projected at state-building harps thoroughly on *morality, moral codes* (Foucault, 1987, p. 28) and *spirituality* (Singhal and Rogers, 2003, pp. 223-224, 228). In all these readings of persecution, marginalisation and victimization of women and the *others*, the hegemonic tendencies of the nexus of the 'church- state-patriarchy' cannot be ignored. The line between the public and the private domain becomes fused, and the nexus of the patriarchy becomes overwhelmingly hegemonic. Women and the other marginals become the targets of the voyeuristic attitude of the

'moral agencies' and 'Community Policing' time and again. The continued victimization of women and the marginals echoes the gendered biases and Human Rights situation in Zo/Mizo society. A gendered reading of the women's experiences in Zo/Mizo society helps to reflect on the position of women as marginals, and at the same time echoes the gender biases and the Human Rights situation as in operation in the Zo/Mizo society under the unique phenomenon of *Community Policing* and *Pan Optics*. The emergence of the women's organisations can be seen as an effort at balancing the skewed socio-politico-economic situation specific to the Zo/Mizo situation and hence, an effort towards empowerment of women through democratic mechanisms and a move towards protecting Human Rights and sensitising the patriarchy. In the process an interesting phenomenon that follows is that 'women who are considered to be the 'politically public outsiders' and are traditionally regulated to the 'private space' inside the home; move outside of the home and into the 'public space' in order to become 'political insiders'³¹.

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Notes

¹ I agree with Michel Foucault's notion of a spatialized history which reflects the arena for power contestation, 'A whole history remains to be written of spaces', which would at the same time be the history of powers' (Rabinow, 1987; Soja, 1989:p21). This, in the case of the Northeast would determine the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Emphasis added: A.S.C

² Lalhmingthanga former Finance Minister of Union Territory of Mizoram has mentioned similar experiences in his Foreword to Dr. A.C Ray's Mizoram Dynamics of Change, 1982, Pearl Publishers, Calcutta.

³ The 'Zo hills' or 'Zo tlang ram' has special significance in the sense that the 'imagery of the Zo region and Zo unification' goes as far as the echoes travel in the hilly terrains of the region between Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chin Hills. The sense of a boundary and international borders hardly makes a reality to the tribes of the region for affinities of primordial identities are far stronger and deeper. The sense of a boundary makes sense only when contextualized in terms of the 'others' which is again a large and fluid category and at times overlaps with the image of foreigners. In other words, the boundary makes sense only when placed in the light of the 'insider' and the 'outsider' debate. Even though the Zo territory within India has been named Mizoram, the term Zoram or 'Zo Tlang ram' continues to be in use to refer to 'the land of the Zos', in short, the term 'Zo tlang ram' or Zoram conveys an emotional, nostalgic appeal and attraction.

⁴ 'Oral History' is a term used to refer to a wide ranging activities from informal conversations about the past ('beetein din' (in Hindi)) among family members, neighbours, or co-workers especially among migrant communities or displaced persons; to formal, rehearsed accounts of the past, presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times or about experiences-old and new; and to recorded interviews with individuals who have an important story to narrate. Oral history in this sense relies heavily on memories and needs a certain degree of 'ice-breaking' between the narrator and the audience.

I take this opportunity to thank the American Center, Kolkata for inviting me to participate at a 'lecture on Oral History', organized at Lincoln Room, American Center on 22nd December 2005 and to Professor. Bruce M. Stave of University of Connecticut and to Mrs. Sondra Stave, Chair of the Economic Development Commission, Coventry, Connecticut for their enlightening lecture on Oral history and methods.

⁵ In the traditional Mizo society, the Pasaltha was a man who showed great talent in hunting, courage warfare, prowess & vigour in sexual life (whether married or single) etc. The Pasaltha was the knight in the shining armour, the chivalrous hero. Hero-worship being an inherent part of the traditional Mizo life continues to reflect in every day Zo/Mizo life even in contemporary times.

⁶ I consider the process of displacement or marginalisation to be a 'calculated' one because the Patriarchy determines how much one is to be displaced, the degree of displacement being controlled by the 'time and space' factor which again changes, according to the benefits that it gives to the patriarchy in operation.

⁷ The Zo tribes used the word 'Sap', a corrupted form of the Hindustani word 'Sahib' to refer to the Europeans i.e. white men. B.B Goswami observed during his field work and interaction with the local people in Mizoram that 'there is not a single Mizo either in urban or in rural areas who told that the Mizos in general can become better or superior than saps'; and also that 'the saps are better than the Mizos for

they have golden hair, beautiful eyes, tall and white complexion' etc. For detailed reading on the construction and imagery of the 'superiority' of the white races in the minds and psychology of the Zo tribes, see B.B Goswami, "out-group from the point of view of In-group: A Study of Mizos", in Dubey, S.M. (1978). *North East India: A Sociological Study*, pp. 99-110.

⁸ The British rulers were concerned with controlling and opening the tribal territories to exploit their forests and other resources. The Protestant missionaries (also other missionaries), who provided medical care as a means to gain sympathy of tribal people with a view to ultimately converting them to Christianity. Hardiman, David. (2007). 'Healing, Medical Power and the Poor: Contests in Tribal India'. *Economic And Political Weekly*. April 21- April 27, pp.1404-1408. Also see Moares, George. Mark. (1964). *A History of Christianity in India: From early times to St. Francis Xavier A.D 52- 1542*. Vol.I. Chapter-X- The Church and Social Medicine, pp. 246-264. Emphasis: A.S.C.

⁹ This is a term I use to denote the whole process of making an already patriarchal system more chauvinistic, manlier. For instance the British consciously or unconsciously helped in the construction of the image or the myth of the "Head-Hunters- the Looshais". In the process, creating the fear among outsiders about the Zo tribes and their barbaric nature. The direct result of this external construction was that the Zo tribes especially the Lushai clans began to think of themselves as brutally heroic and thoroughly manly in their own construction about themselves. The direct result of such misconceived perception about the 'self' was that the projection of the self and also the clan and the tribes in total was always in terms of manliness as evident of the casual use of the phrase 'A Pa', in everyday language in Mizoram. The ritualized everyday practice of coercing young teenage boys to talk in a manly ('Pa') manner/ tone and public exhibition of the 'Til Pawr Aw' (the deep, broken tone of the voice that boys attain at puberty), is another instance of such display of manhood in the Zo society. The importance attached to the stage of 'Til Pawr Aw' (i.e. 'A Pa') can be understood from the fact that a boy with a 'Til Pawr Aw' is considered 'hmeithai rai tham' i.e. fit to impregnate a widow. The construction of the image of the 'Pa' (male, masculine) in the Zo society systematically degrades the image of the 'Nu' (female, feminine).

¹⁰ The Zo tribes and their sub clans form the majority and dominate all the socio-politico-eco-cultural arenas of the society. The Church and the State are the instruments through which the majority dictates their terms to the minorities including the women and 'Vais'. I call the coalition of the majority i.e. the church and the state the Nexus of Patriarchy because it represents the functioning of the patriarchy which tries to dominate the others. The nexus of patriarchy dominates and marginalizes women and by the same token marginalizes the "others" –men and women inclusive.

¹¹ The 'Triad of the Marginals' is a term I use for convenience to denote the similar experiences of women and the 'Others' of victimhood, subjugation and the domination of the hegemony of the majority community (ies) which is very male i.e. Patriarchal in nature and experience, which I term as the 'Nexus of Patriarchy'.

¹² The 'Zawlbuk' was the male dormitory and symbolized male hegemony and vigour in the Mizo society. It was one of the pillars that upheld the chieftainship in traditional Mizo society; however, it was not practiced among all the Zo tribes. The members or the 'Tlangvals' (boys, men) of the Zawlbuk could act in a high-handed manner for instance, if a girl of the village refused to entertain these men during the ritualized practice of 'Nula-rim'. They would go in a group and shake the posts or the stilts of the hut in which the girl and her family lived till it fell down. This practice was known as 'Bang Sawi' and not even the Chief could intervene; to avoid such social embarrassment no girl dared to displease her suitors during the 'Tlai leng' (evening stroll) 'Nula-rim' process. Westernization contributed to its decline and eventual extinction from the Mizo society.

¹³ I use this term to stress on the indigenization of Christianity into the Zo/Mizo belief system and vice versa, i.e. Christianity as practices and preached in Mizoram. (Stress intended to include all tribes professing Christianity in Mizoram: A.S.C). I owe this insight on the tactics of indigenization of Christianity & its usefulness on Mizo society, identity etc to my supervisor Dr. Bonita Aleaz, Reader, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta.

For a detailed reading see, Ralte, Lalrinawmi, (1993), chapter-VII, 'Dance: An example of Crab theology', in Crab theology: a Critique of patriarchy – cultural degradation and empowerment of Mizo women, pp. 193-209.

¹⁴ Christianity as a religion is male centric, it moves around the pivot of the Trinity- the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Christianity revolves around the 'Father-Son Axis' and this axis gets filtered into the individual family system itself. Thus, the male gets to play a more prominent role while the female gets to play a subservient role. In case of the Mizo society, this filtering of the 'Father-Son Axis' psychology led to the further male-ifying of the already male society.

¹⁵ For instance wearing of trousers (men's clothing) is scorned, so is the wearing of salwar kameez ('Vai kawr', Indian dress). Like wise marrying a 'Vai' leads to social ostracization and stigmatization of the children ('Vai fa').

¹⁶ I owe this insight to Professor Rudo B. Gaidzanwa. 'Silence becomes useful to both- those who inflict it as well as those on whom it is inflicted. That is to say 'silence' becomes a weapon for male hegemony (maintained through 'Fear Psychosis') and at the same time it also becomes a weapon for women in her own domain- the household, the private arena. (At the CODESRIA/SEPHIS Extended Workshop, Dakar, 2006). Emphasis added: A.S.C

¹⁷ The traditional laws or the 'Mizo Hnam Dan' are a novel attempt of combining the British laws and the traditional Kuki-Chin-Lushai customary laws. They were compiled by B.C Carey and famously known as the 'Chin Hills Regulations of 1896' under which chiefs derived their authority from the British Superintendent. (Chatterjee, 1995)

¹⁸ The Indian Christian Marriage Act is not applicable in Mizoram and the customary law has fixed the bride price at rupees four hundred and twenty (Rs.420/-), reducing women to a cheap purchasable commodity.

¹⁹ This freedom however does not suggest that the terms of justice for men and women are equal nor does it enable women to enjoy an advantaged position in the Mizo social system. It basically provides freedom of choice as determined by the patriarchy. This has to be understood in the light of the Engelsian debate. I owe this insight to Dr. Samita Sen, Reader, then associated with the Department of History, University of Calcutta. (At the CODESRIA/SEPHIS Extended Workshop, Dakar, 2006).

²⁰ Women have the right to inheritance under the Lushai District Act, No.1, 1956 (Inheritance of Property). A daughter or a wife can inherit property only if the deceased has no heir on the male side. Women, however, are entitled to their own property i.e. the dowry, called 'Thuum', which she gets during her marriage from her parents. A written 'will' formally executed may now confer woman the right to inherit the family property. The inheritance and succession laws under the Mizo Customary Laws unlike the provisions of the Indian Succession Act, is very complicated and patrilineal. As the wife is purchased by giving a bride-price ('Man') her status does not flow from her status as a wife for instance, if a woman is divorced for adultery, the husband is entitled to confiscate all her property including her formal 'Thuum' or the dowry that the bride brings to her husband's home (Chatterjee, 1995).

²¹ One of the best examples of these contradictions was the criteria requisite for entry into heaven (Pialral) while the Traditional Mizo society required that men (married or single) should have sex with as many women as possible during one's lifetime for attaining 'Pialral' incase of women, it was just the opposite. Women had to preserve her virginity and incase she lied about her sexual purity she would anyway be caught by Pu Pawla, who like St. Paul's would be waiting at the gates of 'Pialral' (heaven) and detect all illegal entry. Here, it must be noted that no single women (even if virgin) could enter heaven alone, she was to be escorted either by her father or husband i.e. male relations because women were believed to be directionless, just like the crab and therefore would lose her way. Moreover, spinsterhood was not respected and marriage was a norm expected for women and the pivot around which the life of women revolved. (Ralte, 1993: pp. 25-29, 43-49).

The mass conversion to Christianity has added another dimension to contradictions at the level of 'social conduct' and 'private conduct'. The Mizo society today is in a dilemma whether to opt for the glitters of the contemporary globalized liberal societies or to tread the path of the Holy Gospel and strive for the life beyond or strike a balance between the two. This dilemma is specially found among the young educated youths who have completed their education in other states of India and have returned back to Mizoram to work in their home state. It becomes very difficult for the Mizo youths to digest the dictates of the church and the moral police especially, when it comes to dress code and watching television programmes etc. There are instances where the church has imposed restrictions on inter- community relationships, for instance a Mizo girl should not marry a man from another community ('Vai'). I consider the voyeuristic attitude of the church and its agencies to be a contributory factor to the rapidly increasing rate of corruption, drug abuse and sexual liaisons in the Mizo/Zo society. 'People want a way out of the oppressive restrictive social system' and the easiest route to flow away into the realms of fantasy is by taking refuge to drugs (keeping in mind the regions easy proximity to the international drug smuggling routes) and other means to enjoy the life they have been denied by the moral police.

²² The Mizo society serves as a good example for Bentham's Panoptic Society. In the Zo/Mizo society people live under the spectre of the Pan-optics i.e. constant surveillance of the church and the moral agencies. The only difference being that in the case of the Mizo society, the observer can be seen and sometimes partially invisible.

²³ The process of freeing and liberating functions 'physically as well as mentally', and aims to free and liberate the Zo people and their territory from the dual prejudice and hegemony functioning synchronously at two levels i.e. the Administrative and Religious level.

²⁴ The notion of foreigners as perceived by the Mizos is apparently confusing and very broad, it includes all 'others'. It is very difficult as to exactly pinpoint who would be labeled as a foreigner by the church and its agencies. The general accepted notion is that it includes the 'Vais', the Chakmas and the Burmese and at times it also includes the 'Zo' tribes from the other side of the borders. Here, it must be noted that they make no distinction between Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and Indians etc. Emphasis added: A.S.C
The Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Mizoram since the colonial days has been used and misused by different groups to victimize the minorities time and again. Indians and all foreigners need this permit to enter Mizoram; failing to obtain the ILP can lead to deportation and imprisonment. This has in fact, become a weapon in the hands of the hegemonic tribes to extort money and exploit the minorities, especially the 'Vais' and the 'Pois' (Burmese). For detailed reading see, <http://www.Mizzima.com/MizzimaNews>, 'Burmese Migrants in Mizoram worry threat of deportation'; <http://www.angelfire.com>, 'Chakma Refugees pushed back from Mizoram'.

²⁵ The latest of these 'Vai Bandhs' was called by the MZP, the Mizo Students' Union and the YMA, following the killing of a Mizo youth on 18th July, 2007 by suspected Bangladeshi goons at Dholai in Cachar District, Assam. Quit Mizoram notices were issued to the 'Vais' and a blanket curfew was imposed on the 'Vais' which was lifted only on the 25th of July 2007. The MZP, however, claimed that it had not imposed any curfew, but merely requested non-Mizos to stay indoors for their own safety. It also called a 24 hour bandh at Vairengte the nearest town to Silchar, Cachar or the plains and demanded Rs. 15 lakhs as compensation for the slain youth. (See J.B Lama, The Statesman, 30, July, 2007, 'The inside and out of Mizoram's ethnic skirmishes' for details).

²⁶ The 'Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual' was initially founded in July 1946 as 'Mizo Hmeichhe Hmasawn Pawl' and later renamed as 'Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual'. It is the oldest women's voluntary organisation in Mizoram and has made commendable contributions for people in general and women in specific. For detailed reading see, Sangkima (2004), chapter-19, 'Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual: A Study In Social Perspective' & also chapter-16- 'Women And Politics In Mizoram through The Ages', in Essays on the History of the Mizos, pp. 194-205, pp.159-174.

²⁷ The Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) was established on the 6th of July 1974 and was registered under Registration No. 5 of 1977, Society Act 1860 (Act XXI of 1960) It's Headquarter is at

Treasury Square, Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram. The MHIP is one of the biggest voluntary organizations in the state and its work area covers the whole territory of Mizoram. Any organization that is solely engaged in Social Welfare works may be affiliated to the MHIP. For details see, <http://www.Mizoram.nic.in> 'Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl Mizoram.htm' accessed on 30th September 2006.

²⁸ The last phases of the 'Colonial Rule' in the Lushai Hills brought about an apprehension among the New Elites, of the possibilities of reverting back to the Pre-Colonial system of Chieftainship. Such an apprehension resulted in the birth of a political party called the Mizo Union on April 9, 1946 which inevitably led to the Commoners' Movement or 'Lal Sawi' (Shaking/dismantling the Chieftainship)(Acharyya, 1984; Sangkima, 1990; Nag, 1998, p. 72). This was one of the first instances of rebellion against tradition in the Mizo society, resulting in the permanent displacement of the Traditional Elites by 'the Politicians' (political parties) at the political level. Few scholars refer to this Commoners' movement as 'The Mizo Non-Cooperation Movement' (Laldinpuii, 1996).

²⁹ Bamboo plays an important role in the life and tradition of the Mizo/Zo tribes. It is the perennial source of livelihood and economy but no attention is paid to tap the benefits of this natural resource, which is in abundance in the state. The unchecked felling (smuggling) of bamboo plant has led to ecological disasters as well as loss of revenue to the state. The only time the state and its people wake up to the importance of bamboo is when the ritualistic fifty years cycle of flowering of bamboos occurs in the region leading to great famines- Thingtam and Mautam. The flowering of the bamboos haunts the Mizo psyche and serves as a constant reminder of hunger and the two decades of secessionist movement. The bamboo can be used as an allegory for women in the Mizo/Zo society whose utility is never acknowledged until the outburst of expression. For detailed reading see, Baveja. J.D., (1970) The Land Where the Bamboo Flowers, Gauhati, Assam Publication Board. Also see Verghese, Brig. C.G., and Thanzawna, R.L. (1997) A History of the Mizos- Vol. II. Appendix 3 'Bamboo, the Giant Grass' pp. 292-293; and Barpujari, S.K. (1996). 'Bamboo-Flowering in Mizoram A Historical Review'. Proceedings, NEIHA, 17th session, pp.326-339.

³⁰ Whispering is the by-product of 'Politics of Silencings' maintained by the Nexus of Patriarchy at the public domain and the private domain. The functioning of the chauvinistic patriarchal attitudes tends to silence women at the public arena but at the private domain, women are able to built strategies to overcome the limitations of 'Silencings'. In their private space, women are able to built strategies and speak and at times their voice echoes out of the household into the public arena through their male counterparts. These echoes of women's voices and the voices of the marginalized are what I call whisperings.

³¹ I am indebted to the thoughtful comments given at the review stage by JIWS Bridgewater for this insight.